



DIVISION OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
Olympia, Washington

TITLE: COUNTY SERVICES FOR WORKING AGE ADULTS POLICY 4.11

Authority: Chapter 71A RCW Developmental Disabilities
Chapter 388-850-035 WAC Services – Developmental Disabilities

BACKGROUND

RCW 71A.10.015 states the Legislature “recognizes the state’s obligation to provide aid to persons with developmental disabilities through a uniform, coordinated system of services to enable them to achieve a greater measure of independence and fulfillment and to enjoy all rights and privileges under the Constitution and laws of the United States and the state of Washington.” The legislative intent can be accomplished by providing working age adults the supports needed to achieve gainful employment.

Washington has had much success in providing supported employment services to assist individuals with developmental disabilities in becoming gainfully employed. Gainful employment results in individuals with developmental disabilities earning typical wages and becoming less dependent on service systems. In addition, employment provides the rest of the community with the opportunity to experience the capabilities and contributions made by individuals with developmental disabilities.

In December 2000, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) submitted the *Strategies for the Future Long-Range Plan Phase II Report* to the Washington State Legislature. This report includes the recommendations of the Stakeholder Workgroup regarding adult employment and day program services. The Stakeholder Workgroup recommended persons of working age should be gainfully employed, participating and contributing to community life, using a variety of strategies to reach this status in the community. Specifically, the report states:

“Pathways to Employment: Each individual will be supported to pursue his or her own unique path to work, a career, or his or her contribution to/participation in community life. All individuals, regardless of the challenge of their disability, will be afforded an opportunity to pursue competitive employment.”

PURPOSE

This policy establishes employment supports as the primary use of employment/day program funds for working age adults. The policy establishes guidelines for Case Resource Managers (CRM) and Counties to follow when authorizing and offering services to working age adults.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all DDD eligible working age adults who receive or seek employment and day program services; DDD Field Services staff; and Counties under contract with DDD and their subcontractors.

DEFINITIONS

Employment supports: Services that support individuals to pursue or maintain gainful employment in integrated settings in the community. Key elements of these services include the following: 1) Supports are tailored to the needs, interests and abilities of the individual; and 2) All individuals receive supports to achieve and maintain integrated, gainful employment in their community.

Gainful employment: Employment that reflects achievement of or progress towards a living wage.

Integrated settings: Typical community settings not designed specifically for individuals with disabilities in which the majority of persons employed and participating are individuals without disabilities.

Living wage: The amount of earned wages needed to enable an individual to meet or exceed his or her living expenses.

Maintain gainful employment: Supports required to sustain gainful employment and increase earned income.

Pursue gainful employment: Employment or other activities that demonstrate steady movement toward gainful employment over time.

Supported employment: Paid, competitive employment for people who have severe disabilities and a demonstrated inability to gain and maintain traditional employment. Supported employment occurs in a variety of normal, integrated business environments.

Further, supported employment includes:

- Minimum wage pay or better;
- Support to obtain and maintain jobs; and

- Promotion of career development and workplace diversity.¹

Working age adult: An adult between the ages of 21 and 62.

POLICY

- A. Supports to pursue and maintain gainful employment in integrated settings in the community shall be the primary service option for working age adults. Case Resource Managers (CRMs), in conjunction with County staff, will provide each DDD enrolled individual with information about the policy and be available to answer questions to assist individuals to understand the policy.
- B. Counties will develop and make available services that offer support for individuals to pursue or maintain gainful employment, including support and technical assistance to achieve integrated employment outcomes.
- C. DDD Field Services staff shall authorize services to working age adults that support the individual to pursue and maintain integrated, gainful employment. Services for persons under the age of 62 that do not emphasize the pursuit or maintenance of employment in integrated settings can be authorized only by exception to policy. Adults approaching retirement age, or over the age of 62, will continue to have the option of receiving support to pursue and maintain gainful employment.

PROCEDURES

- A. **New Working Age Adults**
 - 1. Counties and Regions will negotiate contracts to ensure the availability of services consistent with this policy by July 1, 2006.
 - 2. CRMs will provide individuals with information regarding services. CRMs may refer these individuals to Counties for additional assistance.
 - 3. CRMs, in cooperation with Counties, will determine with individuals and family members if individuals would like to pursue or maintain gainful employment in an integrated setting in the community.
 - 4. CRMs will authorize services for individuals who are seeking to pursue or maintain gainful employment.

¹ Source: American Association on Mental Retardation Fact Sheet on Supported Employment, March 2001.

5. If individuals of working age do not want to pursue or maintain gainful employment, then CRMs, in conjunction with County staff, will provide information about generic community services.
6. CRMs may authorize services that do not emphasize employment for working age adults only by exception to policy (ETP).

B. Working Age Adults Currently Receiving Employment and Day Program Services

1. Counties and Regions will negotiate contracts to ensure the availability of services consistent with this policy by July 1, 2006.
2. CRMs, in cooperation with Counties, will determine with individuals and family members if individuals would like to pursue or maintain gainful employment in an integrated setting in the community.
3. Counties will work with service providers to ensure that by July 1, 2006, each individual shall be gainfully employed or have an employment plan, which reflects the goals needed to pursue or maintain gainful employment. Each individual shall receive supports needed to implement the plan.
4. CRMs will continue to authorize services for individuals who are pursuing or maintaining gainful employment.
5. Through July 1, 2006, CRMs may continue to authorize services for working age adults who are in the process of considering employment and developing an employment plan.
6. After discussions with CRMs and/or County staff, if individuals of working age do not want to pursue or maintain gainful employment, then the authorization of county services will be discontinued and CRMs will provide information about generic community services.
7. CRMs may continue to authorize services that do not emphasize employment only for individuals who have been granted an exception to policy (ETP).

C. Review Function

On a semi-annual basis through July 1, 2006, Counties will review service providers' progress towards ensuring that:

1. Services to working age adults are consistent with this policy;
2. Each participant is gainfully employed or has an employment plan; and

3. Each participant has received assistance and made progress on the plan.

The semi-annual progress reports will be submitted to the DDD regional offices.

EXCEPTIONS

Exceptions to this policy must have the prior written approval of the Regional Administrator based on County input.

SUPERSESSION

None

Approved: /s/ Linda Rolfe
Director, Division of Developmental Disabilities

Date: July 1, 2004



**County Services for Working Age Adults Policy
Frequently Asked Questions
July 2004**

1. What does this policy promote?

This policy promotes gainful employment in integrated settings in the community, which has been the preferred option for working age adults who are clients of the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Since the implementation of the County Guidelines in the early 1980's, this has been the policy of DDD. A copy of the Guidelines is available on the division's website at: http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ddd/pdf/c_guidelines.pdf.

The Phase 2 Report of the Stakeholder Workgroup also made reference to employment as the preferred option for people with developmental disabilities and made recommendations to the division that working age adults should be on a "Pathway to Employment." In addition, in years when funding has been made available to the division to support transition from high school to work, supported employment was referenced by the Legislature in the budget language. The policy that the division has developed with county representatives of the Developmental Disabilities Section of the Association of County Human Services and other community partners is the next step in carrying the message that employment must be part of the plan for serving working age adults with developmental disabilities.

2. Does this policy eliminate Pre-Vocational or Community Access services?

No. The policy does not and is not meant to eliminate any services.

3. Does this policy change the focus of Pre-Vocational or Community Access services?

Yes. For working age adults, the role of Pre-Vocational/Community Access is refocused to assist these individuals to pursue and achieve gainful employment in integrated settings in the community. The policy does not limit an individual to one path to employment. The policy allows that individual employment paths may use various services to be successful.

4. How was the 21-62 age range selected for the working age adult definition?

Typically, adults between the ages of 21-62 are in the workforce. With the accommodation of needed employment supports, we have the same expectations of adults with developmental disabilities.

Our rules (WAC 388-825-055) only allow county contracted services after a person turns 21 years of age. Sixty-two is the first opportunity under Social Security rules that people may retire with benefits. The policy uses age 62, which does not mean that a person may not retire earlier. Specifying age 62 ensures that the same expectations regarding retirement age are applied to individuals with developmental disabilities. The Exception to Policy process may allow individuals to receive other county services if they are unable to work or need to retire at an earlier age.

5. Why is there a different date for adoption of the policy (July 1, 2004) and full implementation of the policy (July 1, 2006)?

The policy itself gives counties two years to develop and implement a plan that will put working age people with disabilities on a path to community employment. It also means that everyone will have employment as their goal and will have a thoughtful plan as to how they will accomplish that goal.

6. What if a working age adult does not want to work?

If a working age adult does not want to work, then county services will not be authorized. Case Resource Managers, in conjunction with counties, will provide information about generic community services.

7. Will adequate funding be available to support the implementation of the new policy?

The division is seeking additional funding sources, including the use of Social Security Work Incentives.

8. Can school districts play an important role in the implementation of this policy?

Yes. Many school districts already prepare students to work and many provide job experience. Students who graduate, having spent at least their last three years of public school in an employment curriculum, may already have a job or will have a much easier time finding a good job. The division and counties will continue to work with school districts so that high school graduates leave school with jobs. This policy will help school districts and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction understand that students who graduate must be prepared to work.

9. What if counties/providers cannot find jobs for individuals with significant disabilities?

DDD, counties and employment providers have a proven record in focusing resources and expertise on people with significant disabilities. The division will continue to work with counties and providers to make improvements in the system to find jobs for people with significant disabilities. The expectation of DDD is that all individuals will remain focused and continue to make progress toward their goal of securing gainful employment.

10. How does this policy fit into the division's value of promoting choice for individuals with developmental disabilities?

Individuals will continue to be encouraged and supported to choose the career path and employment goals that best fit their individual preferences and needs. The definition of "living wage" reflects a variety of wage requirements, and this policy encourages individuals to choose from amongst several employment opportunities in their communities. To further promote individual choice, supports and services will be tailored to the needs, interests and abilities of each individual.